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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5414
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INFO RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0535
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2101
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1036
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2689
RUEHRK/AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK 0167
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 1201
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0667
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 4465
RUEHMJ/AMEMBASSY MAJURO 0082
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 1078
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USDOC FOR NOAA/NMFS - US IWC COMMISSIONER HOGARTH AND McCARTY

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SUBJECT: WHALING: GREENPEACE JAPAN ACTIVISTS ARRESTED

¶1. (U) Japanese police arrested two Greenpeace activists June 20 for trespassing and theft that occurred in connection with what the NGO claimed was an investigation of ongoing theft of whale meat by crew members of Japan's research whaling fleet. According to press reports, Junichi Sato and Toru Suzuki of Greenpeace Japan are suspected of breaking into an Aomori (northern Japan) branch office of trucking company Seino Transportation April 16 and stealing a package being shipped to the home of one of the whaling fleet's crew. Greenpeace claimed in a press conference May 22 that the package contained whale meat that the crew member had illicitly taken from the ship. Greenpeace asserted the incident was part of an on going practice of crew members siphoning off part of each year's take for their own use/profit.

¶2. (U) Greenpeace Japan insisted its activists had done nothing illegal and that it had taken the package as evidence of its claim that the crew itself had stolen the meat. In May, the NGO filed a complaint with the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office against 12 crew members of the whaling vessel, the "Nisshin Maru," alleging they stole at least 47 boxes of whale meat. The Prosecutors Office, however, decided to drop the case against the crew members June 20, saying, Kyodo Senpaku, the whaling fleet's owner and employer of the crews, had bought the whale meat and gave it to the crew members as "souvenirs," according to NHK news reports.

¶3. (U) While the Japanese press has generally reported the case matter-of-factly, a June 21 Hokkaido Shimbun editorial raised questions about the actions of both Greenpeace and GOJ authorities. The newspaper stated Greenpeace's argument that entering Seino Transportation's office and taking the box of whale meat were all parts of its own investigation is not justifiable. However, the Hokkaido Shimbun also noted even criminal experts are divided as to the legal merits of the case. The article states some suggest the arrest of the activists is designed to be a warning in the run up to the G8 Toyako Summit. If that is the case, it is a problem, the newspaper argued.

¶4. (SBU) Fisheries Agency of Japan (FAJ) officer Tsuyoshi Iwata told emboffs the case is in the hands of the police and that the FAJ has no comment. Acting head of Greenpeace Japan Takumi Kobayashi told emboffs its investigation of the crew taking whale meat was the NGO's project, but it was the two activists' decision on the spot to take the package. After consulting with its lawyers, however,

Greenpeace Japan decided to argue that the two activists' action was legal and gave them approval after the fact.

SCHIEFFER